

The Man Behind the Creed of

By El Ahlwardt (Gamma Rho/Florida State '73), Director of Development

[Editor's Note: Earlier this year, Frank H. Schrenk, Jr. (Beta Sigma/Lehigh University '51) graciously noted that he was pleased to read the Spring 2004 issue of *The Rattle*, and my column entitled "...Extols Virtue," the basis of which was a recurring reference to those words from the Creed, written by his dad, Frank H. Schrenk. He also explained that he, as a son, could relate, but from a 180 degree perspective, to my comments about being a dad and having a son who is also my brother in Theta Chi.

After exploring that generational Fraternal common ground in our respective lives, I explained to Frank Jr. that with 2006 and our 150th Anniversary just around the corner, I wanted to explore the Creed and the man behind it, his dad, if he would be willing to do so. He readily acceded to my request for additional information. What follows in large measure are both my personal tribute to Frank H. Schrenk, the author of words which have always inspired me, as well as the candid thoughts of love and respect of a 74-year old man about his dad whom he, at the age of 3, lost when he entered the Chapter Eternal on September 20, 1933. Through our conversations, I am very privileged to have moved beyond knowing Frank H. Schrenk, Jr., as a brother in Theta Chi, and a man who has literally always lived gracefully in the shadow of a man he never really knew personally. I am honored to call him 'friend' as well.]



Frank H. Schrenk, Jr.
(Beta Sigma/Lehigh University '51) as a freshman.

In less than two years, members of Theta Chi will celebrate the 150th Anniversary of our Fraternity. That we are within 18 or so months of that milestone event can be largely attributed to the many men who have given of themselves to help maintain and increase the stature and strength of this organization that was conceived and birthed by Frederick Norton Freeman and Arthur Chase.

The beliefs and principals of Theta Chi are embodied in our Fraternity's Ritual, which, through the thoughtful impartation of it by those who conduct it properly, binds us as brothers. We men of Theta Chi keep details of Ritual among ourselves, for reasons that need no explanation.

Publicly, however, many of our friends and loved ones get a glimpse into our Fraternity's core beliefs by hearing men of Theta Chi recite the Creed together, as we assemble for one reason or another. Comprised of three paragraphs and 114 words, the Creed is a public testimony to what the men of Theta Chi stand for, aspire to be, and endeavor to do.

The Creed was written by Frank H. Schrenk, a 1909 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania.

Two years of business employment followed graduation, and in 1912, he secured his Master of Arts degree after returning to his Alma Mater. In 1913, during his second year in Penn's Law School, Schrenk was invited to lunch at the Kappa Chapter of Theta Chi, then only in its second year of existence. Shortly thereafter he was invited to become a member of Theta Chi and was soon initiated. Schrenk was Kappa's alumnus delegate to the Fraternity's 1919 Convention in New York City, and was there elected to the Grand Chapter, first serving as National Chaplain. In 1920, he was elected National Vice President, and served in that capacity until being elected National President in 1926, at the 70th Anniversary Convention for which he was committee chairman. In 1929, his service as National President came to a close, and he again served as National Chaplain from 1929 to 1933.

While National President, and largely because of his personal efforts, the Fraternity established the National Endowment Fund, which provided aid to chapters and worthy students, as well as revenue to maintain the activities of the National Fraternity. The Executive Office of the Fraternity

was also established while he served as National President, with an Executive Secretary in charge, the first of whom was Robert H. Hoge (Rho/Illinois '24). Schrenk was presented Theta Chi's Distinguished Service Award posthumously in 1940.

Frank H. Schrenk was a superb orator, and many of his comments are recorded verbatim in issues of *The Rattle* that sit on shelves at the Fraternity's International Headquarters in Indianapolis. Among those words are details that summarize Fraternity operations of his time, as well as heartfelt expressions about Theta Chi that parallel words within the Creed.

In 1927, at the Fraternity's 71st Convention in Washington, D.C., Frank H. Schrenk provided comments that essentially summarized his first year as National President. He began eloquently with these remarks: "It is significant that we meet for the first time in our national capital. As a fraternal organization we are national in our geographic situation. At this time, we shall have the opportunity, as never before, of making national our scope, ideas, and functionings. We should, and shall, I confidently believe, at this

Theta Chi

convention, lay the foundation upon which the superstructure called national consciousness shall be erected.”

He concluded his comments by noting that “I have unbounded faith in the future and destiny of Theta Chi Fraternity. Our future rests on sound and intelligent leadership. But leadership cannot avail without devoted and loyal co-operation by all chapters, active and alumni, and by every last man in our organization. Faith in our Fraternity must be backed up with fraternity work.

“The scales are in our hands, and it is for us to say or not that now and in the immediate years there shall be great developments. Today, these may seem the vague anticipation of a visionary enthusiast; pertinacious and far-sighted men will be able to make them a reality.

“We believe in Theta Chi. We are Theta Chi. We believe in a greater and better Theta Chi Fraternity.”

Two years later, in his farewell remarks to the 73rd Convention, at the end of his third and final year as National President, Schrenk began by noting “my experience, although exacting, has been inspirational and worthwhile.” He concluded this way: “Even though my days upon this august body be numbered, I say with all the power and force at my command that I shall not retire from active service in the affairs of Theta Chi until the great sleep itself overtakes me. I use this occasion as an opportunity to pledge anew my faith in Theta Chi and to devote my all to its best interests. What little services I have rendered you to date, however humble, have been my best, but my service in the future, less conspicuous, perhaps than in the past, will not only be my best, but my all, as time itself will reveal. To thee, my beloved fraternity, I pass on, merely another milestone, whose progress is eternity in brotherhood. Gentlemen, I believe in Theta Chi, the greater fraternity. God Bless You. Amen.”

Let us turn now to insights about Frank H. Schrenk provided by his son specifically for this publication.

“I have always felt that it was best to start at the beginning. Therefore this brief history, largely gleaned from my recollections of stories told to me by my mom, as well as a ‘family tree’ that was contained in a ‘Baby Book’ kept by her, will start in Germany and Bavaria.

“Dad’s father was William Conrad Schrenk of Tuebingen, Germany. His mother was Barbara Moritz of Brueckenau, Bavaria. How they got together remains a mystery, particularly as they were divided by Religion—a very potent division at that time, as I will explain below. Granddad was a Protestant, Dad’s mom a Catholic. In their countries, this was a No-No. Despite it all, they fell in love, married, and, as a result, were requested to leave the country (then Bavaria) by insistent and popular demand. Like many others, they immigrated to the United States and settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

“Their next known venture was the establishment of a German Bakery in downtown Philadelphia which, in its turn, became a delicatessen/restaurant. Meanwhile, there was a family to consider. Not wanting a home divided by religion, Dad’s folks decided, ‘God should choose.’ If their first-born were a girl, the family would be Catholic; if a boy, Protestant. Dad’s oldest sibling was a boy and the family became Protestant (interestingly, the rest of his siblings were girls).

On November 26, 1886, Dad entered this world in the usual way and, as was expected at



TOP: Frank H. Schrenk holds his 13 months old son, Frank H. Schrenk, Jr. in 1931.

ABOVE: Frank H. Schrenk, Jr., 2 years old, enjoys a day at the beach in 1932, with his dad.

that time, spent much of his growing-up years immersed in books, sports, and helping with the family business. There is some question as to how much his efforts contributed to the profits of the business as he early discovered the delights of ice cream! A major portion of his wardrobe then became a large spoon or scoop hidden in his clothes, which he used assiduously to deplete the stock of ice cream available to paying cus-

Cover Story



Frank H. Schrenk, Jr. in 2004, with one of his dad's beloved bowling trophies, a mantel clock, that was won in 1928. The clock will be presented to the Fraternity's International Headquarters for display.



Frank H. Schrenk, Theta Chi Fraternity's National President, 1929.

tomers. Despite these depredations, the business prospered and he learned the basics of running a successful enterprise.

"Realizing that, in addition to business sense, a key ingredient to success was education, Dad enrolled in the University of Pennsylvania in 1906. He graduated in three years, and along the way he began to hold what became a life-long admiration for Theodore Roosevelt, and his belief in the benefits of the development of physical and mental strength. Following this example and coupled with the desire for evermore education, Dad embarked on a business venture with a friend. They obtained the use of a plot of wooded land in the State of Maine where they proceeded to construct and run a Summer Camp for Boys that happily, thrived.

"Utilizing the profits from this and other ventures, Dad was able to return to the University of Pennsylvania in 1911 where he received a Masters Degree in 1912. He then turned his sights to the Law and received his Law Degree in 1915.

"It appears from the preceding that Dad was a very busy man...this is undoubtedly true. However, emulating his hero T. R., he was also a devoted and accomplished athlete. In 1910 he became amateur welterweight boxing champion of Pennsylvania, and on his return to Penn, became a member of the varsity football team and captain of the water polo team. His interest in athletics continued throughout his life and included tennis, golf, and especially bowling, in which he participated in many nationally-sanctioned tournaments.

"Dad's interest in aiding the development of young men was also a major part of his life. He joined the then-fledgling Kappa Chapter and was elected to the Grand Chapter in 1919 where he served as National Chaplain (1919-1920), National Vice President (1920-1926), National President (1926-1929) and then again, National Chaplain (1929-1933). I suspect he may have written the Creed while National Chaplain the first time, but that is, regretfully, only a guess on my part.

"Throughout his life, Dad devoted his considerable energies to the advancement of young

men in all aspects of life, both physical and spiritual. He was a dedicated Sunday-School teacher at his church and an early participant in the Big Brothers Chapter in Philadelphia.

"There is one particular example of Dad's character that arose as a result of his activities with Big Brothers. I would like to relate this in order to provide an illustration of the impact of his life on the lives of others. Dad never knew of it, nor would he likely have repeated it, such was his modest character. I will just call it 'Freddy.'

"Freddy was born into an abusive family headed by a drunken father. As a result, Freddy was often the target of this abuse, which culminated one horrible night when his father came home and in a drunken rage, threw the small boy down the stairs. After a long hospital stay, Freddy lived but never fully recovered; he was condemned to go through life with an almost useless arm, a twisted neck, distorted speech, and a severe limp. Big Brothers became aware of his plight and sought to help, but found it difficult to find someone to take on the seemingly impossible task of giving Freddy the love and attention he so badly needed. Dad stepped forward.

"Throughout Freddy's growing up years, Dad introduced him to games of all sorts...those he could play (board games—he was quite bright) and those he could merely watch (baseball, football, etc.) Most of all, Dad introduced him to the world of the Spirit and the Love of one human being for another. Freddy grew up, and because of his physical limitations, was only able to earn his living as the operator of a Paper/Magazine Stand in center Philadelphia. Freddy's story could end there but it doesn't.

"After my dad's death in 1933, Mom was left with two children; my now-deceased older brother, Ted (then-17), and myself, then-all of three years old. Ted shortly enrolled in Penn and himself became a member of Kappa Chapter and Theta Chi.

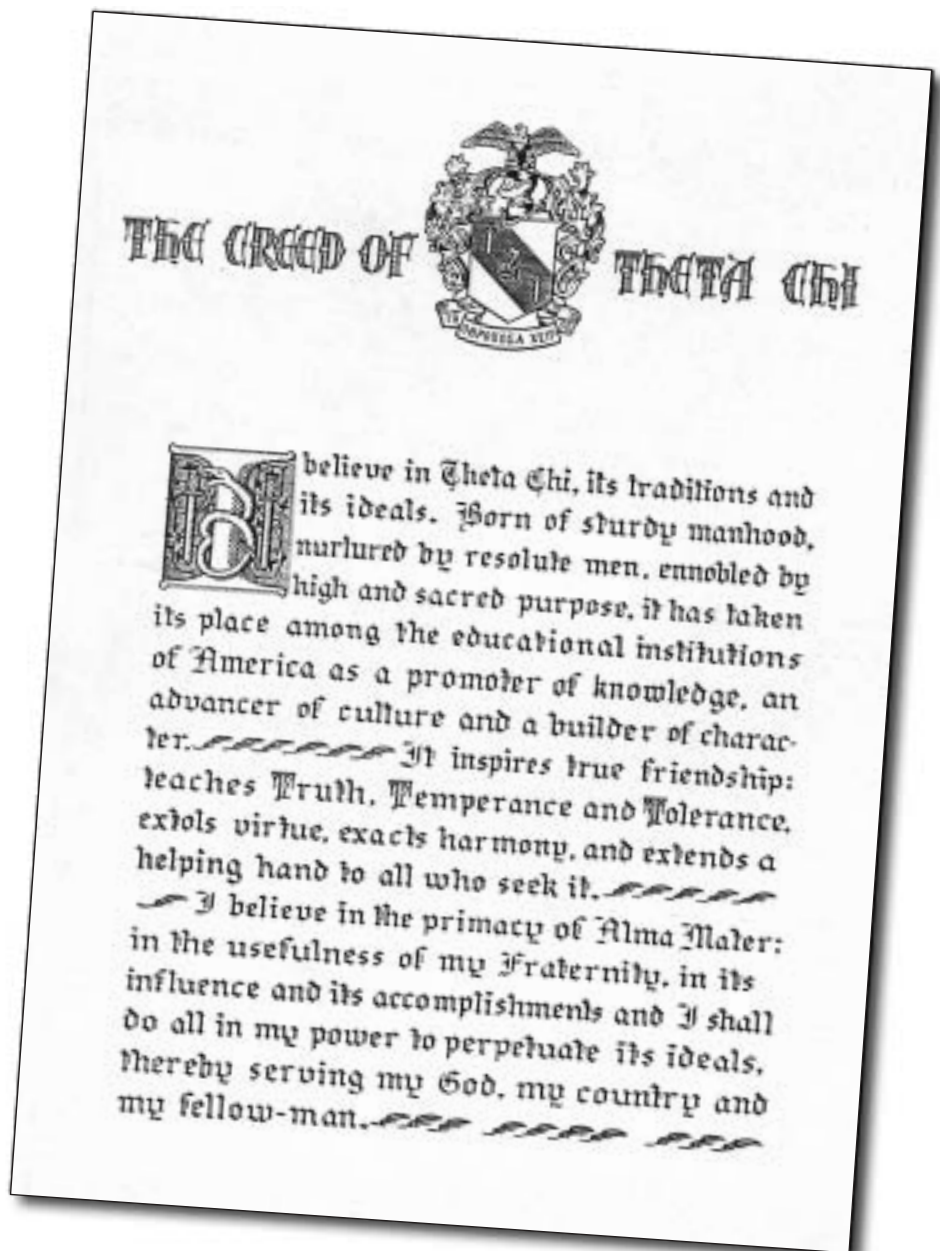
"My memory of those very early years is hazy, so I will skip ahead six years to 1939. I remember

that we had recently moved into a new home and Christmas was approaching. It was evening and a knock came at the door. Mom opened it and there stood a very large, physically deformed man. I expected her to slam the door and call the police, but instead she invited him in. He barely entered the door and handed her a package and said 'God bless you...Merry Christmas.' He then turned and left, refusing any refreshment. 'Who was that?' I remember asking her. She answered, 'That was Freddy. Your father helped him as a boy and he brings us a box of chocolates every Christmas.' Freddy indeed did so until 1943 when Mom remarried, moved to a new home, and her name disappeared from the Philadelphia phonebook. But Freddy's story does not end here.

"In 1951, having completed my courses at Lehigh University, I returned to Philadelphia with a new wife, and moved to a house in the suburbs at least two miles from the end of the nearest bus line. By this time, of course Freddy was not in the forefront of my mind. Rather, he was a pleasant memory from my childhood. However, the name 'Frank H. Schrenk' appeared in the 1952 phonebook. That Christmas, there was a knock at the door. I opened it and there stood Freddy with a box of chocolates in his hand. After 9 years, he had walked, limped really, all of those hilly miles through that cold night to pay his respects. Not to me, mind you, but to the memory of my dad and what he had given Freddy so many years before. This was 19 years after Dad's death, and there was Freddy, saying 'Thank you.'

"My dad is the man who wrote the Creed of Theta Chi. More importantly, he lived it in his daily life. He truly practiced Theta Chi's ideal of the Helping Hand, and was thereby, as he said so well, 'serving my God, my country and my fellow man.'

"I am delighted that Ted's son, dad's grandson, and my nephew of whom I am very, very proud, J. Barry Schrenk, is also my brother in Theta Chi [*Editor's Note: Theta Epsilon/Kennesaw State University '72*]. I wish we all



could have had more time with Dad. But that missing physical piece of our family's past also compels us to remember him well, and to recall with pride the role he played in Theta Chi as a loyal brother and friend at the Kappa Chapter, and as the leader he was on the National level.

"I am at times humbled, and at other times, amazed, to take stock today of how Dad lives on in Theta Chi through the words and spirit of the Creed. I guess in that regard, he's going to outlive us all, and that seems somehow appropriate, as his life was so tragically cut short in its prime. At the end, he was surrounded by very tough challenges during some very difficult times, yet I know from reading old issues of *The Rattle*, that he deeply loved Theta Chi without waiver.

"He was there, in my heart, for me when I became a Theta Chi at Lehigh University's Beta Sigma Chapter. I look ahead a few years from now, and we'll be together, in a way, for the 150th. I know that leading everyone in the Creed there will be one of the highest of the high points of my life. I hope that my nephew and brother in

Theta Chi, Barry Schrenk, will also be there as I know that Dad would appreciate the generational continuity."

Accessible Fraternity records, and the history of our Fraternity, as recorded in *The Manual of Theta Chi Fraternity*, do not record when the Fraternity informally, or formally, adopted the Creed for use. A note to support the August, September, October 1946 issue of *The Rattle*, with the Creed on its cover (as depicted similarly on the cover of this issue), explains the following [emphasis added]: "In an effort to bring the Creed of Theta Chi to the attention of all members, the Grand Chapter directed that the Creed be reproduced in a satisfactory form and hung on the wall of every chapter house in the fraternity. The cover illustration shows the form this reproduction has taken. The creed has been hand-engrossed in three colors on a 9 x 12 inch sheet. The coat of arms is in gold and red, the lettering in black, and the decoration in red, gold and black." ■